

PHILIPPIANS – BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

Acts 16

INTRODUCTION

There are certain events in history that become iconic in terms of creating a huge shift in the world events. You can think of Alexander the Great or Gutenberg and the invention of the printing press. Another iconic event might be the ride of Paul Revere. But there are also events in human history that aren't iconic or as well known. This morning we will talk about one such event. Most people, even students of the Bible, may not realize the shift that occurred as a result of a seemingly unremarkable meeting by the side of a river. This event had a massive impact as God opened up the flood gates and took the gospel from the East to the West; from Asia to Europe.

Proposition:

- I. The Background of Philippi**
- II. The City/History of Philippi**
- III. The Church in Philippi**
- IV. The Letter to the Philippians**

So That: Prepare our hearts and minds for the blessing of the study of the upcoming Philippians study.

This will be more of a teaching message today. We will spend most of today in the 16th chapter of the Book of Acts.

I. The Background of Philippi

Point – Macedonian Call

Proof → **READ Acts 16:6-13**

vv. 6-7 - They passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia; 7 and after they came to Mysia, they were trying

to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them;

In the early portion of **Paul's** second missionary journey (A.D. 49-52).

- Acts 15:36 - from Jerusalem in the Promised Land up through Asia (Modern Turkey)

“they” - Paul, Silas and Timothy

Paul is prevented from going North, South, and East.

- **Paul** is a man on a mission.
- He is a man of action to spread the gospel.
- **Paul** receives his “Macedonian Call.”

Acts 16:8-11 - and passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. 9 A vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” 10 When he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. 11 So putting out to sea from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and on the day following to Neapolis;”

v. 9 - God gives **Paul** a vision indicating God wants him to cross over into **Macedonia**

v. 10 - **Luke** joins them in Troas

- based on **Luke's** personal experience, told in minute detail and with dramatic vividness
- The first **“we”** section of Acts

v. 11- go across Aegean Sea and arrive at **Neapolis**, the seaport of **Philippi** (11 miles inland).

They are taking the gospel from Asia (modern day Turkey) to Macedonia (modern day Greece).

Point – The Greeks were among the most affluent society on earth at that time. But they did not know the Gospel. They had everything their world offered, and yet they had nothing.

II. The City/History of Philippi

v.12 - “and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia, a *Roman* colony; and we were staying in this city for some days.”

Point – Formerly called Krenides which means “the little fountains,” as there little fountains/spring around the city that would water the fields. It was the capital of the province of Macedonia. It was at the top of the Aegean Sea. This is part of Eastern Macedonia (NE Greece) and part of the land route to Asia Minor.

Krenides also had gold and silver mines. People rushed to the minds and it grew in population.

Its location is exceedingly strategic. Unless someone was going to take a boat across the sea, all land routes would go through Krenides/Philippi. It was also a pass through the mountains.

It was the pass between Asia and Europe, the East and the West.

Philippi was named after **Philip II of Macedonia**, father of **Alexander the Great**. **Philip of Macedonia** fortified the town of Krenides in 356 B.C. and named it **Philippi** after himself.

Running right through Philippi, for 500 miles from Greece to Italy, was the *Via Ignatia* (Ignatian Highway). It was built in 146 B.C.

A man named **Gaius Octavius** was born in 63 BC in Rome. When he was 20 years old, his great-uncle, Julius Caesar, was assassinated - in 43 BC. In his will, **Julius Caesar** named **Octavius** as his heir.

For you readers of Shakespeare, in his play “Julius Caesar,” you may remember the famous *Battle of Philippi* with **Brutus** and **Cassius** fighting against **Marc Antony** and **Octavius** to avenge the betrayal and murder of Julius Caesar.

☺ **Octavius** wasn’t a two inch wax figure come to life with a cowboy friend named Jedidiah.

In 31 BC, **Octavius** defeated **Antony** and **Cleopatra** at the Battle of Actium.

→ **Octavius** became “**Caesar Augustus**”

→ the first Caesar of the Roman empire

→ 40 year reign from 27 B.C. to 14 A.D.

→ Luke 2:1

→ Rome shifted from a Republic to an Empire

Octavius populated **Philippi** with veterans retired from the war.

And it became “**a Roman colony**” (Acts 16:12). To be “**a Roman colony**” was the height of dignity for a town. Roman colonies had military significance. They were a part of the Roman settlement in order to Ward off attacks from barbarian hordes and preserve the *Pax Romana* (Roman peace) on the edges of the empire.

The people in “**a Roman colony**” enjoyed three things: they enjoyed *libertas*, which means self-government. They were not governed by Rome. They were governed by themselves.

Second, they enjoyed *immunitas*, or immunity. That meant they were free from taxation by Rome.

Third, they enjoyed *ius italicum*, the rights of Roman citizenry. They had all the rights of anyone who lived in Rome.

The city rulers were called praetors; we translate that word magistrates. And the police were called lictors. They imitated the

Roman style of life. They imitated the Roman culture in every sense.

Latin was the official language but Greek was also spoken well.

Because **Philippi** was a military and agricultural city, rather than a commercial city, few Jews had gone to city.

For Jewish people at that time to establish a synagogue, they needed 10 men → so they went to a “place of prayer” outside the city by the river (Gangites).

- group of women at the river (similar to women at the tomb)

- **Psa 137:1** – “By the rivers of Babylon, There we sat down and wept, When we remembered Zion.”

→ for Israel, the riverside developed into “**a place of prayer**” (Acts 16:13)

Remember when Christ rose from the dead and there was an angel at the tomb, it was a group of godly women who were there. And here, it is a group of godly women who are the initial recipients of the first proclamation of the Good News of the victory of Jesus Christ in Europe.

Seemingly unremarkable meeting by the side of a river. But this is one of the most pivotal events in all of human history.

→ You and I are sitting here in 21st century western America because God took the gospel from Asia into Europe.

God is taking the gospel from the East to the West, from the oriental world to the occidental world, from Asia to Europe.

It is here in this strategic mountain pass that

→ the Gospel first sets its feet in the Western world.

→ Meeting place of East and West – strategic place for the spread of the Gospel

Illustration - In 1848, Charles Ellet was hired to oversee the building of a suspension bridge across Niagara Falls. He quickly

realized that he did not have a way of stretching the first cable between the shores. If a boat tried to cross the river, it would be swept over the falls. So, he came up with the idea of a kite flying contest. The idea was to get a kite to fly from one shore to another with a cord attached. If they could get the cord across, they could use it to take the heavier cables and begin building the bridge. This seemingly small event of someone winning the kite flying contest actually led to the building of the mighty suspension bridge that traverses Niagara Falls.

Application - This seemingly small event that we see in Scripture, - meeting at the riverside - had a massive influence in the future. In the same way, Beloved, we don't know what kind of impact one small event or meeting or conversation we are a part of will have in the future. And we may never know on this side of glory.

“He who is a Christian in small things is not a small Christian.”

III. The Church of Philippi

Point – Recall the **Sons of Japheth** **Genesis 10:2-5**

- 14 descendants
- most went primarily to the north into Europe with one major branch into Persia/India

Point – 3 key Philippians from Acts 16 that form the foundation for the work of God in Philippi

Proof

→ **Lydia**

16:14-15

Lydia is the first recorded European believer.

She was a business woman from Thyatira was a proselyte to Judaism.

Lydia was a religious woman, she was a devout woman, but she wasn't a Christian.

But she left the river side changed.

She was baptized and a believer.

v.14 - “the Lord opened her heart”

This is what the elders and I always pray. That there will be some who will come to our gatherings, like this Sunday morning, that there will be some who will come in as Lydia in the morning and leave as Lydia in the evening.

→ **A certain Slave-Girl** **16:16-18**

We hope the **slave-girl** who was demon possessed was saved. That her deliverance was a full deliverance, not a partial deliverance.

→ **The Jailer** **16:19-34**

Point – The **jailer** got saved because the songs **Paul** and **Silas** were singing weren't senseless little ditties. They were singing the kind of songs we sing at STBC. They have the gospel in them.

These 3 Philippians from Acts 16 are a beautiful picture of the diversity of the church:

Diversity in → Ethnicity

Lydia – Asian,
Demon-Possessed Slave-Girl – Greek
Jailer – Roman

Diversity in → Religion

Lydia – Jewish Proselyte
Demon-Possessed Slave-Girl – Pagan
Jailer – Emperor Worship

Diversity in → Social Class

Lydia – Rich business woman
Demon-Possessed Slave-Girl – Slave
Jailer – Roman Soldier

Point → Christ is the gracious Sower who prepares the soil of the heart of devout Lydia to receive the seed of the Word.

He is the conquering Warrior who steps on the neck of the demon tormenting the slave girl and binds the strongman to set her free.

He is the majestic Lord over creation riding the earthquake to rescue the jailer from suicide and his sin.

Acts 16:35-40

Paul's refusal to be spirited away in the middle of the night is not a desire for personal justice. It is his desire to protect the fledgling church in Philippi.

Luke apparently remained behind to guide the affairs of the church. The first "we" section ends at Philippi.

Acts 17:1 – the travels are back to "they."

The second "**we**" section begins when Paul returns to Philippi (Acts 20:5). It is possible that Luke was there the entire 7-8 years in-between the two journeys.

IV. The Letter to Philippi

Point – The church in Philippi is a solid, a sanctified church. A missions-minded church. This is Paul's letter to a good church.

It is a diverse church. It is a mature church. It is a Gentile church.

This letter is an intensely personal letter to his beloved brothers and sisters. This is a church that brought Paul great joy.

Unlike his other epistles, in this letter, as well as his letter to the Thessalonians, Paul does not appeal to his authority as an "apostle". He instead emphasizes their union in Christ.

Also, this letter emphasizes the gospel and uses the word "gospel" more than any other letter Paul wrote.

How appropriate we have two baptisms at the end of our service. Zach and Tricia, you are following in the footsteps of Lydia of old and the jailer, both of whom were baptized after being saved ... how perfect.

We, at STBC, are doing the same thing that the believers in this wonderful, mature church did as well. Praise God that there has always been one way to salvation.

CONCLUSION

As we finished up our study of Genesis, I was considering which book of the Bible to study next. I was drawn to Philippians and 1 Thessalonians – both are mature good churches – perfect match for STBC. **Phil 1:9 “And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment”.** This is my prayer for STBC, that while we study Philippians we will grow in love and discernment.